

The unique contribution of this book is its preservation of a pot-pourri of firsthand recollections from participants in this wartime work effort. Thus the book is particularly useful as a supplement to other materials that describe and analyze women at work during World War II.

ALLISON ZIPPAY

*School of Social Work  
Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, New Jersey*

*Out of the Class Closet: Lesbians Speak.* Edited by Julia Penelope. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1994, 481 pp., \$16.95 (paper).

In this assembly of narratives, interviews, and conceptual articles, Penelope has masterfully orchestrated how lesbians have experienced and lived issues of class. And although each chapter reflects the uniqueness of each contributor, together the works reveal universal public and private themes that transcend individual lives. The beauty of the book is its crossword-puzzle-type matrix, in which the reader is carefully guided toward an understanding of complex intertwined phenomena by incrementally identifying dimensions and their relationships. Thus the intersection of class and gender touches issues that are relevant to all persons, regardless of their sexual preference, and so connects diverse readers to the experiences of lesbian women through commonalities. What an ingenious way this is to illuminate and expand the understanding of a group for those who do not belong to it. And for those who do, the works are enlightening, challenging, and affirming.

In her introduction, Pauline Bart not only provides a window through which to view the book, but adds the richness of her experience and knowledge to subsequent pieces. One striking yet alarming point that she makes is that women's class is dependent on men and on happenstance, as illustrated by her mothers' movement among diverse classes of women.

Penelope artfully develops the conceptual framework by calling on a broad range of knowledge and theory to posit the construct of class as a complex infrastructure that defines us, limits or privileges us, and creates a reference group to which we can belong or resist. Moreover, she suggests that the elements of gender, sexual preference,

and ethnicity exponentially magnify the influence of class on individual lives.

Anchored on the conceptual framework of class, each work not only builds a collective knowledge but also celebrates the rich heterogeneity of lesbians, their thoughts and their individual lived experiences. The contributors, who represent a wide range of educational, class, spiritual, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds, as well as diverse speaking-writing styles, weave metaphors for class, such as the condition of one's teeth, food, or the meaning of home, throughout the stories. Each contributor acknowledges, whether through acceptance, rejection, or a reaction between the two, that one's childhood and family continue to be essential components of adulthood as one eschews, integrates, and finally accepts them as one's past.

A noteworthy theme of the book is the importance of intellect and thought, regardless of one's background or current class status, in promoting an understanding of class and in facilitating social change. Consistent with this view that ideas are a catalyst for change is the fact that the stated purpose of this collection, to impart understanding as the first step toward social change, is achieved in every area of the book.

ELIZABETH DEPOY

*School of Social Work  
University of Maine  
Orono, Maine*